

Al Graf, W1OQP 1960's WARS President:

By Scott Nacey, KK6IK

Al Graf, W1OQP appears many times in the pages of *The Wellesley Townsman* from the 1940s through the mid-1970s—not as a public official or businessman, but as one of the steady, technically-minded citizens who helped weave Wellesley's civic fabric through wartime and the long Cold War years that followed. When I joined WARS in the late 1970's Al was still a club member, but was seldom seen as being very active – sadly, he was one of the quiet older generation of people that my High School buddies never really got to know. Al surfaces in *The Townsman's* dispatches from wartime service Pacific, in Wellesley Veterans of Foreign Wars notes, and in Civil Defense and ham-radio reports. Read consecutively, these brief notices sketch a portrait of a local man whose life mirrored Wellesley's own journey from World War II service to community preparedness exercises.

Letters from the Pacific

Graf's earliest appearances in *The Townsman* belong to the war years. In March 1944 the paper printed a letter home from "the Pacific," one of the many voices of Wellesley men scattered across the wartime map. Later that same year, in August, another piece described life "on Saipan," as part of the Marianas campaign that summer. The brief items did not offer any personal stories, but they placed Graf—and others from Wellesley—amid the Navy's forward operations in the Pacific islands.

By March 1945 *The Townsman* carried an item titled *Radioman in Manila*, again noting Graf's continuing service. Al served on the USS Sigourney (DD643) a Fletcher Class destroyer. From historical records, Al likely participated in the US invasions of Cape Torkina, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in 1943 and experienced numerous air attacks on his ship. Al's note from Saipan says that he was part of the June through August 1944 action to take Tinian where the atomic bomb attacks on Japan originated a year later, as well as the support of the Mariana Islands battles.



USS Sigourney (DD643) in the 1950's
source: Wikipedia

When the war ended, an October 1945 story announced that he had been *honorably discharged* . The same year brought another notice reporting that he was “in California with [his] wife,” a quiet line that marked the transition from service abroad to civilian life and a return to Wellesley.

Early 1946 closed the wartime sequence with a short report on Graf’s *War Record in the Navy – Return to Harvard University*. It summarized his demobilization and his plans to resume studies—a fitting postscript to a two-year thread that had followed him from Saipan and Manila back to Massachusetts.

From Service to Community

The *Townsmen*’s lens then shifts from the Pacific to Wellesley society. In the 1950s Graf’s name begins appearing in the familiar civic columns that chronicled the life of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). A 1955 piece, *VFW Musical Involvement*, listed him among the local veterans active in post and community programs. Two years later, an April 1957 note identified him as the *Wellesley VFW Surgeon* —an organizational title used by VFW posts for the member responsible for welfare and first-aid matters. By April 1959 another article, *VFW Historian*, showed that he had become the post’s chronicler.

Continuing Roots in Civil Defense

By the early 1960s Wellesley, like towns across the country, had built a Civil Defense network of volunteers, radios, and sirens. The *Townsmen* first recorded the local effort in an October 1951 item noting “Early Civil Defense and W1TKZ mention” —an early sign of the partnership between municipal officials and amateur radio operators as documented in prior SparkGap articles by Dan, W1DAN.

Graf soon re-entered the news in that capacity. A photo spread from April 1969 showed “Wellesley’s Civil Defense Ham Radio Operators,” with a caption identifying the front row as “Larry C. H. Jones, Ludwig G. Fasolino, Civil Defense Director George P. de Coen, Albert H. Graf and Dr. William H. Emerson” . The accompanying article, *Wellesley Civil Defense Director Salutes Local Ham Radio Operators*, described how the communications group had been organized in 1951 and had “since manned and serviced the CD short-wave radio stations in both public and private buildings, holding practice drills every Sunday morning.” It listed Graf as call sign **W1OQP**, operating from **319 Worcester Street**, alongside fellow operators from around town.



Photo from the August 1969 showing Al Graf, front row second from the right, and other WARS members in their Civil Defense role

source: The Wellesley Townsman, April 24, 1969

The piece recorded Director de Coen's tribute for their dependable performance "during the Northeast blackout in November 1965 and more recently during the standby flood alert of 1968." Graf and his colleagues, it said, had also handled "radio communications for the big parade on Veterans Day, 1968."

The 1968 Veterans Day Parade

That same year the *Townsmen* devoted another article to Wellesley's **Veterans Day Parade**, in which Graf again figured prominently. "Under the direction of Marshall H. Cannell, WA1DMC, CD Communications Officer, 25 Sheridan Road," it read, "Wellesley CD communications personnel include Roger P. Smith W1EOA, Albert H. Graf W1OQP, 319 Worcester Street, Walter E. Lenk K1YTY ... Dr. William H. Emerson WA1EVD ... and others."

The parade article gave unusual detail on the operation: fixed and mobile stations were "to provide instant communications to appropriate town departments in case of emergency." A dozen operators would ride in cars along the route, relaying reports "from Wellesley Hills to its East destination in Wellesley Square." Fire Chief William F. Donahue Jr., the town's Civil Defense Director, offered "high praise for this group of amateur radio operators whose support for our Civil Defense programs will again ensure an effective communication operation."

A continuation page completed the account, naming Graf once more among the operators whose calls were coordinating the parade from the fixed stations at the Red Cross, Newton-Wellesley Hospital, and the police and fire departments. "Mr. de Coen has had high praise for his Communications Section for the job done during the 1968 Veterans Day parade," the article reminded readers; "members' interest and support for Civil Defense aims will again insure an effective operation during this year's parade."

The Simulated Emergency Test of 1975

Although not from the 1960's, Graf's longest and most descriptive *Townsmen* appearance came on **January 30, 1975**, in an article headlined *Ham Operators Participate in Simulated Emergency Test*. "Few citizens realized it," the article began, "but Wellesley was hit by a 1973-style hurricane last Saturday. Damage was so bad that all town emergency services were in operation." Of course the storm was imaginary. It was a *Simulated Emergency Test* conducted by members of the **Wellesley Amateur Radio Society (WARS)** "to practice radio communications and operating procedures."

Graf's name appeared midway through the column in a roll call of guys that I knew a little later in the 1970's: "Taking part in the exercise were Wellesley residents Roger Wilmarth (WN1RSV), Gordon Kingsley (WA1TAM), Richard Jansson (WA1QLI), Charles Chabot (WA1UHF), Christopher Wiles (WA1RGA), Donald Chesley (WA1HVS), William Downing (WA1PQY), Walter L. Lenk (K1YTY), Albert H. Graf (W1OQP), Marshall H. Cannell (WA1DMC), David Curry (WN1TAK), Robert Jacklin (WN1PMC), Mark Jung (WN1KSE), and others."

[A fun fact: Gordon Kingsley, WA1TAM introduced me to Ham Radio with his HW-100 which he brought to his summer job as a counselor at Camp Netop in Casco, ME in the summer of 1977. Gordon's time at Camp Netop is noted in August 9, 1976 SparkGap! – Scott, KK6IK]

Under the direction of **Richard Jansson WA1QLI**, the club's Civil Defense Communications Officer, operators "met at the society's headquarters, 230 Washington Street, to begin the emergency exercise." Mobile units circulated through town reporting on fifteen simulated trouble spots: flooded roads, fires, casualties, ambulance calls. "Thanks to the Wellesley amateur radio operators," the paper reported, "the situation seemed well under control." By the end of the drill, "more than fifty messages had been passed back and forth," and the "operation had been a huge success." Graf was listed again in the closing paragraph, one of the dozen amateurs whose cooperation earned public thanks from **William E. Donahue Jr.**, the town's Civil Defense Director.

Continuity of Service

From the sequence of *Townsmen* clippings, Graf's contribution is defined less by single dramatic events than by a continuity of public service across three decades. The wartime reports show the young radioman in uniform; the 1950s VFW notices show him preserving the fellowship of veterans; and the 1960s-70s Civil Defense articles show him adapting his radio skills to community protection.

Unlike many post-war figures whose names flicker briefly in the society pages, Graf's appears steadily, usually in the context of collective volunteer work. In each decade he occupied the same middle ground between technical operator and civic participant. The *Townsmen* never quoted him directly, but his inclusion in every list of radio operators implies a long term commitment to the town of Wellesley – both it's civic and social life. Graf was one of the bridges between the early-1950s founding of WARS and its activities twenty-five years later.

No *Townsmen* headline announces Al H. Graf as a central figure in Wellesley's history. His story is told instead in fragments: a radioman's letter home, a discharge notice, a VFW title, a photograph of a Civil Defense radio net, a byline in a simulated storm. Yet taken together these fragments chart a life of consistent civic purpose.

Thanks Al.

(sources are kept for a book or online publish later, but not submitted for the Spark Gap)

Primary Sources (All from The Townsman, Wellesley MA):

1944-03-24 *Letter Home from the Pacific* ;

1944-08-04 *On Saipan* ;

1945-03-16 *Radioman in Manila* ;

1945-07-06 *In California with Wife* ;

1945-10-11 *Honorably Discharged* ;

1946-01-24 *War Record in Navy – Return to Harvard University* ;

1955-01-27 *VFW Musical Involvement* ;

1957-04-04 *Wellesley VFW Surgeon* ;

1959-04-23 *VFW Historian* ;

1951-10-04 *Early CD and W1TKZ Mention* 【20†source】 ;

1969-04-24 *Civil Defence Photo* 【42†source】 ;

1969-10-2 *fence Article and Photo**